

20 days until the Browns opener. 26 days until Ohio State vs. USC. Mo Williams is a Cavalier. And Cliff Lee is chasing the Indians second straight AL Cy Young Award. Things are heating up in CTown, and this should be a very exciting fall for Cleveland sports fans. In The Weekend Wrap, Peeker hits on all these topics and more as we steamroll towards one of the most exciting times on the sports calendar.



Countdown to Liftoff?

This Browns preseason reminds me of a long, meaningful putt in a major golf tourney. There's a buzz as soon as the putt is struck and then a huge buildup of emotion as the ball nears the hole. When it's clear the ball is heading into the cup there is a huge roar that goes up as emotions are vocalized and let loose.

Everything the Browns have done so far during this training camp and preseason is leading up to the September 7th opener at Cleveland Browns Stadium against the Dallas Cowboys. And like the gallery at that golf tourney watching that big putt drop into the cup there is no doubt that Browns fans are ready to let loose with years worth of emotion when toe meets football in 3 weeks.

Last year's 10-6 record came out of nowhere and paved the way to the sky high expectations of this August. And nothing that's occurred in training camp has dampened fans' enthusiasm. And why should it? The Browns returned to respectability last season despite watching their starting QB play just one half of one game before being dealt to Seattle the following week. Fans watched in stunned amazement as Derek Anderson assumed the controls and finished 10-5. Anderson just completed his first training camp as the unchallenged starter and by all accounts has made some improvements to his short game and generally settled into a leadership role.

He has, more or less, a full season and another training camp under his belt with some potent offensive weapons.

On the defensive side of the ball the preseason game against the Jets gave fans flashes of Shaun Rogers and the value legitimate defensive linemen can have on a game. Sure, there are still questions but optimism trumps reality in August.

Three weeks to go before we begin to find out where this team truly stands. And the gallery is dying to let it loose.

More Mo

I like it. Who doesn't?

The Cavs gave a couple 30-something pieces and parts in Damon Jones and Joe Smith to land another potential running mate for LBJ when they acquired Mo Williams from Milwaukee last week.

Williams is a 25 year-old combo guard who can shoot the basketball and take it to the rim. He's not the classic distributor and assist machine who commands the floor. I think of him as a more consistent and explosive version of Delonte West. But guys with scoring ability and pure point guard skills are so few and far between that you're not going to pry them loose from someone who does have one for what the Cavs gave up in this deal.

Smith was a good player and a veteran leader whose experience and knowledge of the game make him a valuable player. But he's also 33 years old and headed to his 11th team in 14 years (Minnesota and Milwaukee twice). You can find 8ppg and 5rpg if that's what you need for a stretch run. He's way beyond his seasons as a premier talent.

Jones, 32, was a one-dimensional player who had worn out his welcome after three up and

down seasons in Cleveland. Again, 6ppg and no defense just aren't in high demand. What Jones did bring to the table was some serious entertainment value. It's going to take a long time to get used to not seeing his signature "Three on a platter" gesture after knocking down a three-pointer. And no one can out talk or out dress Jones. The guy was 100mph from the word 'go'. Unfortunately, actual production on the court means more to this Cavs team than Jones' theatrics and studio host potential.

Great to see Danny Ferry step up and make a deal that will benefit this club immediately from training camp and into the season rather than waiting to see what players are available as the trading deadline approaches. Even better is that Ferry still has a huge expiring salary bullet remaining in the gun in the person of Wally Szczerbiak. Ferry has improved the club and maintained some personnel flexibility. Win-win for the Cavs.

Put Your Head Down and Go

The Cleveland fan's mind is above all else protective of its owner. Perhaps no fan base in all of sports is better able to rationalize failure and compartmentalize disappointment. So it is with this baseball season in Cleveland.

Falling out of the race in May? That was injuries and young players not performing up to expectations.

Trading last season's Cy Young Award winner and a homegrown super-talent? Just the price paid for failed expectations and for simply playing in a city not called New York, Chicago, Boston or Los Angeles.

And we criticize and express our frustrations. We have for as far back as any of us remember. But we've also become accustomed to focusing on what few bright spots any given season provides us.

Cliff Lee is the latest example.

Lee currently sits with a 17-2 record in this dismal Indians season. He may not be the lone bright spot in this wasted summer but he certainly has burned the hottest. After a disappointing couple of seasons the last two years that included injuries, an altercation with catcher Victor Martinez following a beaming of Sammy Sosa, a resultant demotion to Triple-A Buffalo and some personal issues, Lee has rebounded this year with a Cy Young-caliber season. The soon to be 30 yr-old (August 30th) lefthander not only leads the AL with his 17 wins but he also leads all MLB starters with a 2.43ERA. There's no posting a mid 4ERA and relying on a ton of run support as Lee did in the past. Lee is winning and winning regularly with or without run support and he's been simply dominant in doing so.

Lee has always had solid major league stuff. He won 46 games from '04 to '06 with the Tribe. But this season Lee has truly come of age. Lee has clinically commanded every pitch in his repertoire. The two-seam, four-seam and cut fastballs have gotten Lee ahead in the count and the slider, curve ball and changeup have put away the best hitters the majors have to offer far more often than not.

Lee gave Clevelanders a reason to be proud even as the season spiraled down the drain when he was named the starter in this season's All Star game and he responded to the challenge of facing the NL's best hitter with 2 shut out innings and 3 strikeouts while surrendering just one hit.

Lee has thus far been oblivious to the turmoil surrounding him here in Cleveland this summer. When all is said and done Lee is likely to eclipse his career best in wins, strikeouts, ERA and innings pitched. He's also on pace to bring to Cleveland a second consecutive AL Cy Young Award.

There's a lot out there to be frustrated about in regard to the 2008 Indians. But to let the disappointment of this season stain the season long performance of Cliff Lee would be inexcusable.

Title Game is Early This Year

Most of the talk in this town these days centers on what's wrong with the Indians and what color jerseys the Browns are likely to don in the Super Bowl come January. And that's somewhat

understandable given the expectations each team faced entering their respective 2008 seasons.

But we are just about 30 days away from what amounts to a playoff game to the BCS Championship Game for the Ohio State Buckeyes. After what appears to be a couple of tune-up games (and after watching Michigan fall to Appalachian State in one of these 'tune-ups' last season I'm extremely leery of using that term) against Youngstown State and Ohio University in weeks 1 and 2, the Buckeyes travel to southern California to face the Trojans of USC.

Depending on what poll you look at you'll find either OSU or USC in the 2nd and 3rd spots. And with the 'overrated' stigma firmly attached to the Buckeyes following two straight lopsided championship game losses, deserved or not, the heat will be on Ohio State in Los Angeles regardless of the game time temperature.

The Buckeyes simply can't afford to lose that September 13th football game. An 8pm start guarantees a huge national audience and also guarantees that most poll voters will be watching OSU very closely. A stumble and loss would all but bury the Buckeyes in regard to any national title hopes.

I'm stating for the record that September 13th is also the night that Jim Tressel fully takes the wrappers off of his prized recruit, QB Terrelle Pryor. Tressel will not show his hand by using Pryor to any great extent in the first two weeks but I would not be surprised in the least to see Pryor play a large role against USC. 6'6" and 235lbs of speed, power and athleticism is too much to leave on the sideline. Expect to see Pryor anchored to the pocket in his first two appearances should he see the field at all as Tressel is already going out of his way to trumpet the fact that he sees Pryor as a pass first QB.

Don't buy it.

Against the Trojans the handcuffs come off and Pryor starts reprising the Tim Tebow role as a dual run/pass threat.

The Buckeyes have far too much to lose to leave that silver bullet in the gun in week three.